

(Letter from the Prelate: July 2011)

My dear children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

After traveling to Pamplona for my medical checkup and also to visit the sick, I intend to go to the Ivory Coast to speak with your brothers and sisters in that very dear country, for whom we have been praying during the last few months. Let us continue doing so now, so that the wounds produced by the war may be healed as soon as possible, without leaving resentment nor hatred; that all may be generous in forgiving; so that the reconciliation between the two sides may become a deep reality, for the good of families, of civil society and of the entire nation. Let us commend these intentions to the Most Holy and Merciful Heart of Jesus, whom we are honoring today, the first of July, in the liturgy, and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, whose feast is tomorrow. And let us pray for all those places where suffering abounds.

This feast of Jesus invites us to put ourselves, with a trusting and filial prayer, in the Heart of that God who became flesh for love of us. As our Father wrote in a homily, “that is what true devotion to the Heart of Jesus means. It is knowing God and ourselves. It is looking at Jesus and turning to him, letting him encourage and teach and guide us.”¹ Now, too, from heaven, he is prompting us to renew our desire to progress in our personal dealings with the Most Blessed Sacrament. Regarding this, I have considered again some suggestions of Blessed John Paul II, in his apostolic letter, where he traced the paths of the Church for the new millennium. After pointing out, as the primary objective, the awakening of zeal for sanctity in the whole People of God, he specified: “This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all by the *art of prayer*.”²

Our Lord, whom we do not stop thanking for his goodness—we must not stop—, makes use also of the example and the teachings of our Founder, so that each and every one of us, other Christians as well, may attribute the greatest importance to the cultivation of a serious and constant prayer life. Let us feed this eagerness by the assiduous reading of the Word of God and through participation with our whole self in the liturgy—especially in daily Holy Mass—until we make dealing with God flesh of our flesh, soul of our soul, life of our life. Even though we spend many years making an effort in this matter, we are convinced of our need to begin again day after day. As Benedict XVI points out, “we know well, in fact, that prayer should not be taken for granted. It is necessary to learn how to pray, acquiring this art ever anew as it were; even those who are very advanced in spiritual life always feel the need to learn from Jesus, to learn how to pray authentically.”³

Don Alvaro frequently recalled a resolution formulated by St. Josemaría when he celebrated his seventieth birthday: to become a soul of prayer. Since our Lord began to manifest himself in his life, in his adolescent years, our Father entered onto paths of prayer and was always faithful to this daily filial conversation with God. The fact that, after so many decades, he manifested this desire, aside from revealing his profound humility, was like a confirmation of what Benedict XVI said, based on the experience of the saints.

We have often stopped to consider those scenes of the Gospel that show Jesus in dialogue

1 St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 164.

2 Blessed John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 32.

3 Pope Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 4, 2011.

with his Father God. The apostles marveled at this attitude of the Master and once asked him: *Domine, doce nos orare*;⁴ Lord, teach us to pray. Jesus gave them the *master plan*, the guidelines through which Christian prayer should be directed: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*.⁵

This path can be followed in many ways, because the relationship of each soul with God will always be very personal; our Lord cares for each of us like a jewel of priceless value. This is a moving reality because each soul has been redeemed at the price of the blood of Christ.⁶ Let us not forget that, in consequence of his daughters and sons following this great highway of Christian prayer, which leads to our heavenly Father, by means of Jesus Christ and driven forward by the Holy Spirit,⁷ our Lord has told us: *vigilate et orate*,⁸ watch and pray. As Benedict XVI says, we all have to attend *the school of Jesus*. From our beloved Father we have learned to treat God with the piety of children and the doctrine of theologians, with hunger to turn to Jesus as our older Brother and to Mary as our Mother, to St. Joseph as the father of the supernatural family of the Church, and to the angels as companions and guardians on the road to eternal life.

Let us daily renew our eagerness to deal with God personally. I am referring now to those daily periods dedicated to meditation, which make up—together with recourse to the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist—the place abounding in springs, the fountain of fresh water with which we have to saturate our work, our apostolate, our family and social activities; in short, our whole life; including the hours dedicated to sleep or relaxation. I assure you that it is not difficult, not even in times of spiritual dryness or of physical or mental exhaustion, if we let ourselves be guided by the lights of the Holy Spirit and the counsels of spiritual direction.

In 1973 St. Josemaría said: “We have to be contemplative souls, and for that we cannot neglect meditation. Without prayer, without meditation, without interior life we would not do anything but evil. ... Now it seems that we have a greater obligation to be truly souls of prayer, generously offering our Lord all that we are involved in, and never abandoning our conversation with him, no matter what happens. If you behave in this way, you will live close to God throughout the whole day, and you will make a serious effort to live very well those two daily half hours of meditation.”⁹

Our Father did not ask us that we *do* the prayer very well, but that *we make an effort each day* to begin, follow, and finish the prayer well. This is a goal which is within our reach, by beginning again each morning, putting aside past failures, great or small. The rest, practically everything, blossoms forth as a fruit of the action of the Paraclete in our souls, because *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words*.¹⁰

Let us seek then, first of all, punctuality in those appointments with God, which mark off our daily path. It may seem like a matter of little importance, but, following the teachings of St. Josemaría, I can confirm that it does have great importance. “Never neglect your mental prayer.

4 *Lk* 11:1.

5 *Mt* 6:9-10.

6 See *1 Pet* 1:18-19.

7 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *A letter on some aspects of Christian meditation*, October 15, 1989, no. 29.

8 *Mt* 26:41.

9 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family gathering, September 1973.

10 *Rom* 8:26.

What is the best path to be contemplatives? It is prayer. If a soul begins to think that he or she does not know how to pray, that what the Father taught us is very difficult, that our Lord is not saying anything, that you don't hear him, and the thought occurs to you that this being the case, I will let it go and do nothing but pray vocal prayers, this would be a bad temptation.

“No, my children! We have to persevere in our meditation. Tell those complaints to our Lord in your periods of prayer; and, if it is necessary, repeat the same aspirations during the half hour: Jesus, I love you; Jesus, teach me to love; Jesus, teach me to love others for you. ... Persevere in that way, one day after the other, for a month, a year, another year, and at last our Lord will say to you: You dummy, I was with you, at your side, from the beginning!”¹¹

Difficulties can present themselves: excuses, deceptive reasons to delay or cut short the half hours of meditation. Therefore it is good that we give importance to punctuality in periods of more intense work, or in moments in which we experience tiredness or discouragement. As the Pope reminds us, “prayer is not linked to a specific context, but is written in the heart of every person.”¹² It is always possible to speak with the divine guest of the soul; one can be in any place and in any situation, although, whenever possible, we go to the Tabernacle, where Jesus is really and substantially present, with his body, his blood, his soul, and his divinity. In any case, we always have to make the effort to recollect ourselves, setting aside, as far as possible, distractions that might assault us. In one of his talks of catechesis St. Josemaría said: “We recollect ourselves interiorly and we adore God, who has deigned to possess us, and we begin to speak with him, with naturalness, as one would speak with a brother, with a friend, with one's father, or mother, with a neighbor that we esteem: as one would speak with a loved one. Speak trustingly and you will see how well it goes for you. You will have interior life.”¹³

I would like to stress that at times we do not know what to tell him, how to converse with him, we lack words; but let us not forget then that praying “is an inner attitude, more than a series of practices and formulas, a manner of being in God's presence more than performing acts of worship or speaking words.”¹⁴ Another reason to go faithfully to one's time of mental prayer is situations of stress or of interior dryness; and obviously in those cases, taking care in this recourse is especially necessary. On occasion, one's filial chat with our Lord will not even give rise to interior words; but the fact of accompanying him during the moments set aside for this, without seeking sensible consolation, is a very clear demonstration of love of God, of identification with his most holy will, of forgetfulness of self. “In this turning to ‘Another,’ in directing himself ‘beyond’ lies the essence of prayer, as an experience of a reality that overcomes the tangible and the contingent.”¹⁵

There is nothing more consoling than the certainty that, if we are able to love and to have contact with God, this is because *he first loved us*.¹⁶ This is affirmed by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when it teaches that “in prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.”¹⁷ For this reason, the resolution to be very conscientious in the repeated daily times of meditation will *force* God—to express it in some

11 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family gathering, September 1973.

12 Benedict XVI, Address in a general audience, May 11, 2011.

13 St. Josemaría, Notes taken during a family gathering, 1972.

14 Benedict XVI, Address at a general audience, May 11, 2011.

15 Ibid. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, October 15, 1989, no. 30.

16 *1 Jn* 4:19.

17 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2567.

way—to grant us his grace with greater abundance. Do you frequently consider that the only weapon of Opus Dei is and will always be prayer? How are you *defending* the service of the Work to the Church with this weapon? Certainly the more we are souls of prayer, the more we love and maintain the spirit that we received from our Father.

The teachings of our Father on prayer contain an enormous richness and are of great utility. Which of us has not felt himself or herself described at some time in those phrases from one of his homilies? “I do not deny that over the years people have come to me and have told me with real sorrow: ‘Father, I don’t know what’s come over me, but I find I am tired and cold. My piety used to be so solid and straightforward, but now it feels like play acting. ...’ Well, for those who are going through such a phase, and for all of you, I answer: ‘Play acting? Wonderful! The Lord is playing with us as a father does with his children.’

“We read in Scripture: *ludens in orbe terrarum* (Prov 8:31), that God plays over the whole face of the earth. But he does not abandon us because he adds immediately afterwards: *deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum* (Ibid.), my delight is to be with the children of men. Our Lord is playing with us! So when we feel that we are just play acting, because we feel cold and uninspired; when we find it difficult to fulfill our duties and attain the spiritual objectives we had set ourselves, then the time has come for us to realize that God is playing with us, and that he wishes us to act out our play with style.”¹⁸

I don’t want to finish these lines without mentioning some of the more significant dates of this month. We will be living in the presence of Don Alvaro on July 7, the date of his petition of admission into the Work. On July 16, the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, it is reasonable that we remember in a special way our Father’s sister, Aunt Carmen, who contributed so much to strengthening the family atmosphere of the centers of Opus Dei. On that date, also, let us commend the blessed souls in Purgatory in a special way, confiding them to the intercession of our heavenly Mother.

As I ask you almost tiresomely, let us remain united in prayer; let us pray for one another, for the apostolic work in the whole world, for the intentions of the Holy Father. In front of the Tabernacle, in our periods of meditation, we can present our Lord with the intentions that fill our soul, making use of the intercession of our Lady and St. Joseph, of the guardian angels, and of St. Josemaría, our beloved Father.

I am happy to write to you that on Saturday, June 18, I visited the island of Sardinia, Cagliari, where I prayed before their Patroness, Our Lady of Bonaria. I can testify that St. Josemaría prayed for that country and I am sure that many Sardinian people will respond with generosity to the call of our Lord, precisely through the petition of our Father. Let us help them, because from there they also are helping us with full hands.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Pamplona, July 1, 2011

18 St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 152.